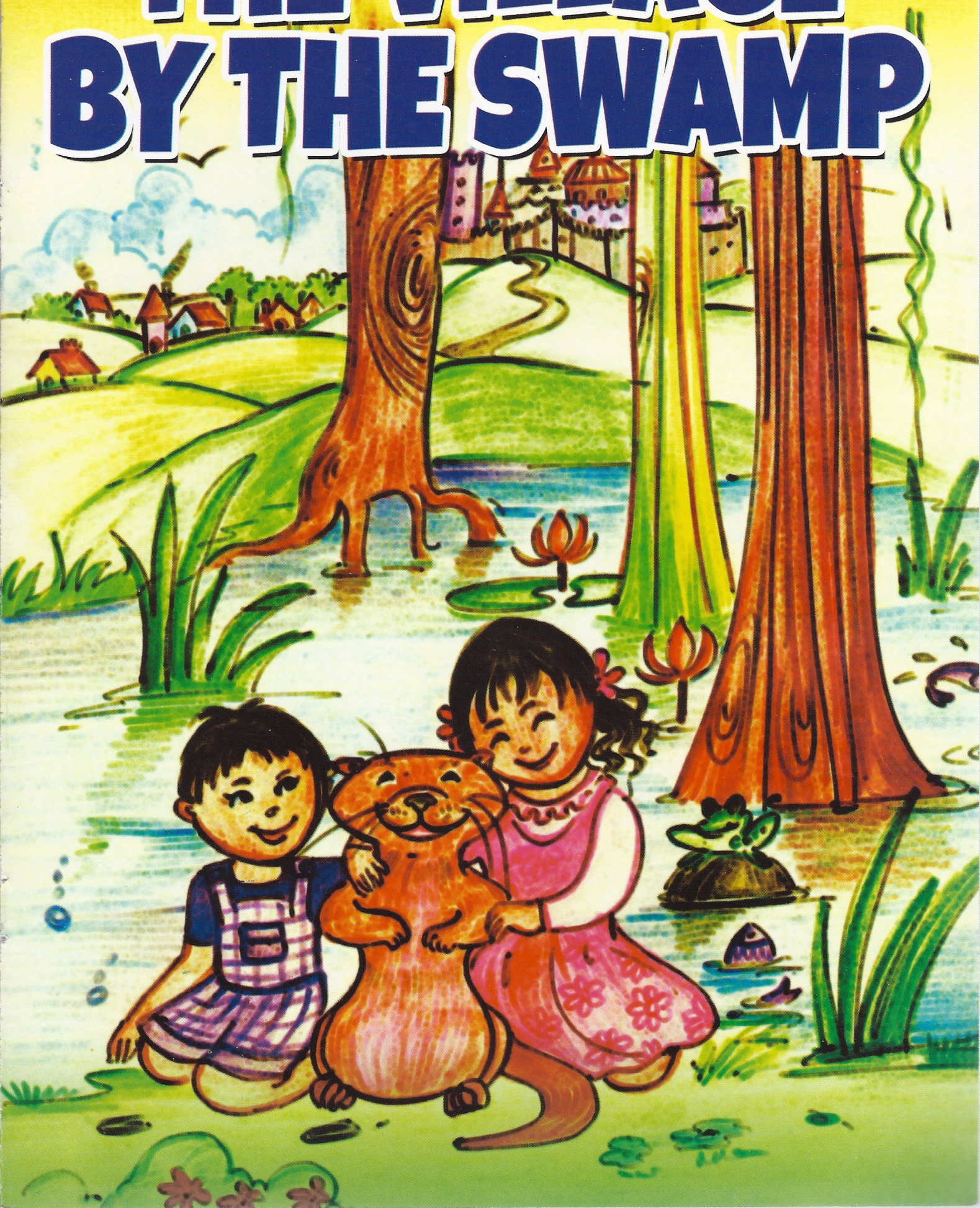


# THE VILLAGE BY THE SWAMP



## THE VILLAGE BY THE SWAMP

In this story, a village does well living in harmony with nature, especially a swamp near it. However, a rich man fills up the swamp and builds a hotel there. The plants and the animals in the swamp are destroyed. An otter family who lived in the swamp leaves the area but a baby otter is left behind accidentally. Two children living in the village look after the baby otter.

When the rains came, the area gets flooded and the villagers lose their harvest. Children bring this damage to the notice of the King of the land. The King closes down the hotel and converts it into an exhibition centre and orders the area to be allowed to turn into a swamp again. Life slowly returns to normal in the swamp and the village. The baby otter joins its family again.

The otter is a small mammal commonly living in the swamps of Asia. Otters play an important role in the swamps. The ultimate aim of this book is to introduce this shy, timid animal in the swamp to the children by way of a small story.

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# THE VILLAGE BY THE SWAMP

Once upon a time there was a beautiful land. It had tall mountains and green valleys. There were large fields planted with rice, wheat, corn and vegetables. It had small villages and a few big towns. The king of the country lived in a castle in the biggest town. In the centre of the country was a large swamp.

The swamp was a strange place. It had pools of water in some places and dry land in other places. Trees grew there that could live both in water and land. Moss covered the branches of the trees. Reeds grew on the edges of the water. Lotus and other plants floated on the water. The swamp was home to a lot of animals. There were many fish, otters, crocodiles and frogs living in the water. Many birds used to dive for fish. There were small deer living on the dry land.

Ripples, was an otter who lived in the swamp. She was short, but long. She had a long, strong tail. She had small, short, webbed paws. Her body was covered with dark brown fur. She had small, brown eyes and small ears sticking out of her head. She had long whiskers on her chin.

Ripples lived with her family in a holt or home in the bank of one of the pools of water. It was hidden by reed and had a secret entrance that only Ripples and her family knew about. Ripples had four brothers and sisters. Her mother and father looked after all of them.

Ripples loved to swim. She was a very good swimmer. She was also good at catching fish. Sometimes, after eating a fish, she would roll and tumble and play in the water with her brothers and sisters.

Jamie and Mandy were two little children who lived in a small village at the edge of the swamp. Jamie and Mandy would visit the swamp with their mother when she went to collect firewood. Sometimes, they would take long walks in the swamp with their grandfather. Grandfather showed them the animals and plants in the swamp. Jamie and Mandy liked to watch the otters play. They had seen Ripples play in the water and swim and dive with her brothers and sisters. They liked to listen to the sounds from the swamp. Sometimes, when they went to sleep, they could hear the loud ‘croak, croak’ of the frogs.



Many people in their village used the swamp. They collected firewood, fish, lotus and other flowers and used the swamp for various other things. The people didn't hurt the animals in the swamp. The villagers were poor, but happy.

One day, a well-dressed man came to the village from the big town. He asked the villagers, “Who owns this swamp?”

One villager said, “no one”.

Another said, “It belongs to all of us”.

“We all use the swamp. That’s how it has been for hundreds of years” an elderly man who was Jamie and Mandy’s grandfather, said.

“So the king can give or sell the swamp to anyone”, the man said. “I want to fill the swamp and build a big hotel there. Then everyone in the village will have jobs. You won’t be poor anymore”.

“We like the village and the swamp to stay the same. We don’t want any change”, Grandfather said.

But some of the villagers, especially the young men and women wanted the hotel. Then they would have jobs and they would be rich working in the hotel. The village headman also thought the hotel was a good idea. He told the rich man to tell the king that the villagers wanted the hotel.



The rich man told the king about his plan and got permission from the king to fill the swamp and build a hotel. The king told him not to fill the whole swamp, just a part of it.

In a short while, lots of people and machines came from the big town and started cutting down the trees and filling the swamp. They filled the pools of water with soil. Dust covered the plants and most of the village too. Most of the animals started moving to other areas of the swamp. The lotus and other water plants died.

One day, Ripples's father said, "We have to find another place to live. The humans are filling our pool and streams. We won't be able to live here. The fish are dying, so we won't have anything to eat. Let's go away from here tomorrow."

So that night, Ripples and her family started swimming away from their home. They were very sad to leave, but they had no choice. Their home would have been destroyed and they wouldn't have anything to eat because the pool was being filled by the humans.

When they came to the bank of the pool, they started walking along the path. They walked and walked. Ripples was getting tired of walking. She was the smallest and had to run to keep up with her family. They were getting further away from her. At last she was so tired, she stopped walking.

"Wait for me! I can't walk anymore!" Ripples cried. But her family didn't hear her and kept on walking further and further away from her. Poor Ripples was so tired, she couldn't even call her family. She fell down on the side of the path and was soon fast asleep.

The next morning, Jamie and Mandy went into the swamp with their grandfather to see what had happened to the trees and plants and animals. They were sad and angry to see all the trees cut down and the streams and pools filled. They couldn't see many animals or birds.

Suddenly Mandy cried out, “Look, what’s that on the path?”  
“It looks like a dead animal”, Grandfather said. “Don’t go near it.”

But Jamie bravely went near the animal. It was Ripples. “It’s a small otter, I think she’s alive!” Jamie said excitedly.

“Oh! Poor thing! It must be one of the otters we used to see playing in the pool. But she’s a long way from home”, Mandy said.

“The otter family must have been leaving this place. I think this little otter was left behind. She won’t live long alone here”, Grandfather said.

“Let’s take it home and look after her. We can feed her and she can live with us”, Jamie said.

“That’s a great idea! Please let’s do that Grandfather!” Mandy pleaded.



“Well.....alright. You can take her. May be we can at least save one animal here. But you have to look after her very carefully”, Grandfather said sternly.

“Thank you, thank you Grandfather! We’ll take good care of her” the two children said excitedly.

Mandy carefully picked up Ripples and Jamie took off his T-shirt and wrapped her up in it. They quickly took Ripples home. With the help of their mother and grandfather, they got a cardboard box and lined it with some old newspapers and clothes. They laid Ripples in it. Mandy placed a small bowl of water in the box next to Ripples. Grandfather told them not to disturb her and to let her sleep.

They took turns to see how Ripples was doing. After a few hours, Ripples woke up and drank a little water. Jamie saw this and told Mandy and Grandfather.

“Look Grandfather, look Mandy....the otter is waking up!”

“We should try to feed her now”, said Grandfather. He placed a plate with small pieces of fish near Ripples.

After a while, Ripples slowly started eating the fish. Slowly Ripples recovered. The children were careful not to disturb her and took turns feeding her. She started to make friends with Mandy and Jamie after a while.

Meanwhile, the men working on the hotel finished cutting down the trees and filling the pools of water. They then started to build the hotel. It was very noisy with the machines working day and



night. The villagers were getting tired of the noise and the dust. They couldn't get what they wanted from the swamp, because their part of the swamp was destroyed.

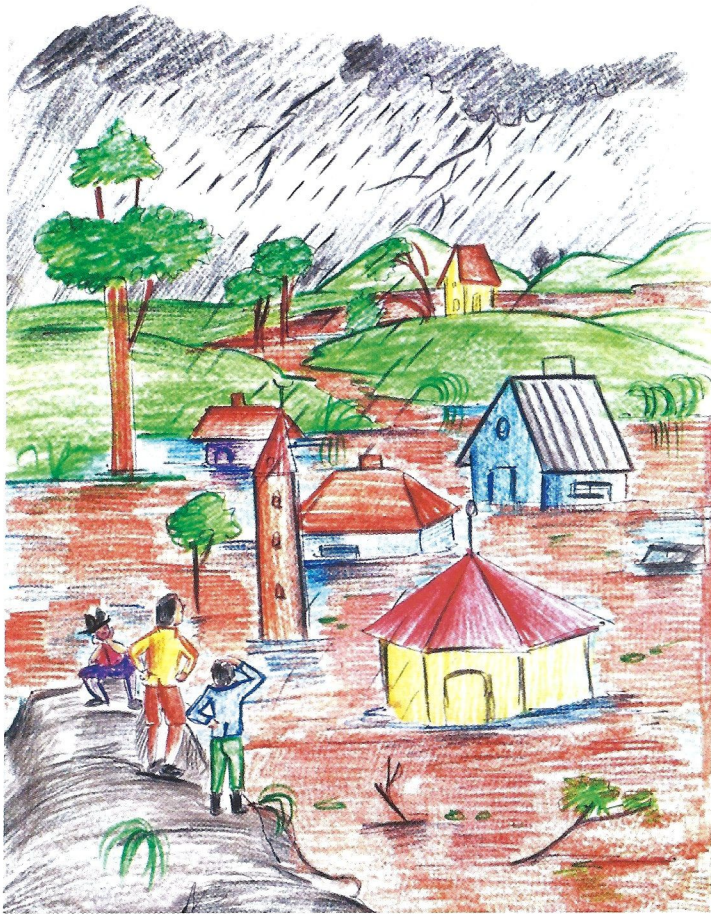
The rainy season arrived in the country. Usually the rainy season lasted about three months. During that time, it rained day and night. Because the rain water couldn't drain into the swamp, it started collecting in the village and the fields. In a few days, the whole area was flooded.



The area where the hotel was being built also flooded.

The villagers were very angry. They never had floods and suddenly, their village was flooded. All their possessions were destroyed by the water. The water also covered their fields of rice paddy, corn, wheat and vegetables and destroyed these as well.

“The floods are happening because the water can't drain into the swamp. This never happened when the swamp was there”, Grandfather said.



The villagers agreed. “We should tell the king what’s happening”, they said.

“No, please don’t tell the king. I’ll pay you for the damages. I’ll replace all your belongings and pay for your crops as well. But please don’t tell the king”, the rich man said. He wanted to save his hotel. “I’ll put in pipes for the water to drain.”

Because the rich man paid for all the damages, the villagers didn’t tell the king. The floods slowly receded. But the rich man didn’t put in the drains as promised, since it cost too much. The villagers also forgot about the drains because they got a lot of money from the rich man.

A year went by. The rich man built a large hotel. It had big gardens and swimming pools and golf courses. Some of the villagers got jobs in the hotel. But ordinary villagers like Jamie and Mandy were not allowed into the hotel or the gardens because they were too poor.

Meanwhile, Ripples got bigger and lived with Mandy and Jamie. But she never forgot her family and always thought about them.

Sometimes Jamie and Mandy took Ripples to the area of swamp that remained. It was very small and they noticed that the water was not as clean as before. There were tins and bottles and other garbage floating on the water. It had a bad smell too.

Grandfather said angrily, "All the drains from the hotel open into the swamp. They are using the swamp as a garbage dump."

Soon the rainy season was back. It rained and rained and rained. And because the rich man didn't put in the drains and the water had nowhere to go the whole village flooded. The fields flooded too. The villagers were angry.



Because the hotel was built on the swamp it flooded as well. The visitors to the hotel were very angry too. Their possessions were damaged and they couldn't play golf or walk in the gardens. All the visitors left.

The villagers wanted to complain to the king. But the village headman wanted to keep silent, because he was being paid by the rich man.

One day, the village got a message from the king that he was touring the country. He was coming to visit the village and the hotel. He wanted to see how the villagers lives had improved after the hotel was built.

The children heard this news. They decided to tell the king about the destruction the hotel had brought to the swamp and the village. But they couldn't tell the king directly.

"I know what we can do! Let's do a play for the king showing the damage the hotel did", Mandy said.

"That's a very good idea Mandy! We can use the little otter's story and also our story to tell the king what happened", Jamie agreed excitedly.

They gathered their friends and started practising the play that both of them wrote. The ladies in the village agreed to stitch some simple costumes. They practised in secret, because they didn't want the rich man or the village headman to hear about the story of the drama. These men would have stopped them acting the play for the king.

The day the king was arriving dawned. Everyone was very excited. The villagers dressed in their best clothes and hung up flags and banners to welcome the king. The king arrived with all his ministers and a large crowd of people. He was welcomed to the village by the village headman and the rich man. They took him around to

show him the village and the hotel.

The rich man told the king “The hotel is doing well. We gave jobs to the villagers. We have used environmentally friendly products in the hotel. We even managed to save some of the swamp.”

The village headman agreed. He said “Many people are employed in the hotel. The hotel has made the whole village prosperous.”

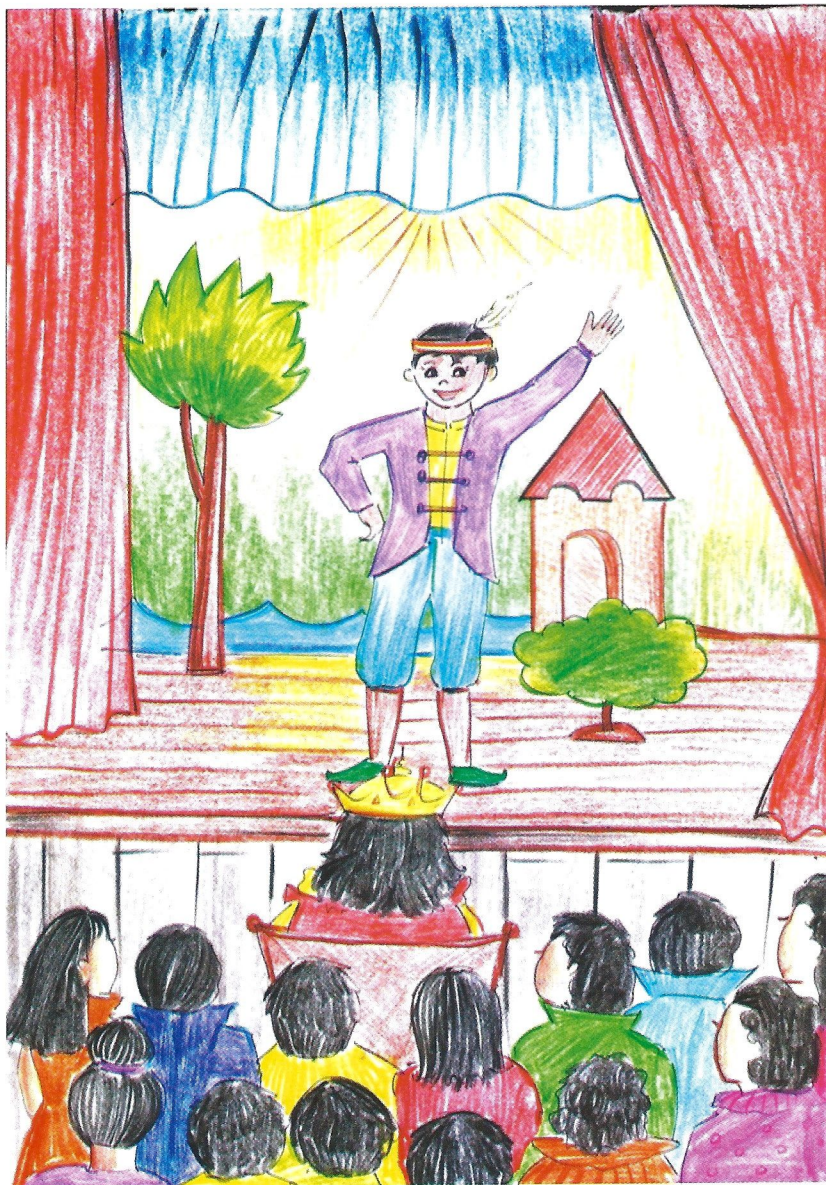
At last, the time had come for the children of the village to act their drama. Everyone gathered at the village grounds. The king and his ministers sat in the best seats.

Jamie was the narrator. He came to the centre of the grounds and said, “This is the story of our village and the changes that happened to it during the past few years.”

The children came out and acted out the play. They showed how the village was in the past. The village was poor, but they had good



harvests from their crops. The swamp was their friend and they lived in harmony with their surrounding environment. Then the rich man came with his machines and started to fill the swamp. The animals died or went away. The plants and trees were cut down



and died. The otter family left their home. The little otter was left behind and nearly died. The children found it and looked after it. When the rains came, the village and fields were flooded along with the hotel. The villagers lost their harvest and their possessions. The village headman and the villagers were paid to keep quiet about the destruction.

While the play was going on, the village headman and the rich man were getting more and more uncomfortable. They kept looking right and left and at the king's face. The king was looking angry. The village headman and the rich man slowly got up and tried to leave the village grounds unnoticed.

“Arrest those men!” The king ordered in a thunderous voice. The children stopped their play and everyone looked around in wonder. Soldiers arrested the village headman and the rich man.

The king stood up and said, “I think these children are telling the truth. Everyone else is afraid to tell the truth. I want a complete investigation of what has happened to this village and the swamp. The hotel will be closed.”

“I didn’t think the swamp was important. That’s why I gave permission to build the hotel. But these children have showed me how important the swamp is to us humans and animals.”

He proclaimed, “The hotel will be turned into an exhibition centre which shows what the swamp is like and how important it is to us. The hotel gardens and golf courses will be turned back into swamp land.”

The villagers cheered. They were very happy that their swamp was going to be saved and they would get jobs in the new exhibition centre.

The next year, Mandy and Jamie took Ripples to the new swamp and released Ripples. They hoped she could find her family again. They watched sadly as she gave a final splash





with her tail and swam away. But they were happy as well, because Ripples was home at last.

When Ripples swam to where her home used to be, she found that there were some other otters there. When she looked closely, she saw that it was her family. Ripples was so happy. Her family were so happy to see her again too!!

Ripples, her family and the swamp animals and Jamie, Mandy and all the villagers lived happily ever after in harmony with each other.





## What is an otter?

Otters are small mammals. They are very shy animals and live in any clean body of fresh water, including lakes, streams, rivers, ponds and marshes. Some otters such as the European otter may also live along the seashore, in salt water, but they need regular access to fresh water to clean their fur. The sea otter is exclusively a marine animal.

The picture on the back cover shows two otters. They have long, slim bodies and relatively short limbs with webbed paws. Most have sharp claws on their paws, and all except the sea otter have long, muscular tails. They are very fast swimmers.

Otters mostly eat fish. They also eat shellfish and frogs. Some otters are expert at opening shellfish and others will feed on available small mammals, amphibians or birds. Otters are very active and playful animals, chasing prey in the water or searching the river beds, lakes or seas. They appear to engage in various behaviour patterns for sheer enjoyment. Different species vary in their social structure. Some live as solitary animals, while others live in groups.

There are 13 species of otter living in the world. In Asia, there are five species, namely European/common otter, small-clawed otter, hairy-nosed otter, smooth-coated otter and the sea otter. The small-clawed otter is the smallest and the sea otter is the largest.

It is very important to protect the otter as it is at the top of aquatic food chain. The otter is highly sensitive to any form of disturbance, pollution and habitat destruction. Because they are so sensitive they act as a warning signal for the health of the environment and this is obviously important for the well-being of humans as well.



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